50TH CONGRESS, 1st Session. } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. { REPORT No. 1335.

MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF PRISON-SHIPS AT FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN.

MARCH 27, 1888.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Mr. MAISH, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 1687.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 1687) for the erection and completion of a monument to the memory of the victims of the prison-ships at Fort Greene, Brooklyn, N. Y., do respectfully report:

After the battle of Brooklyn, Long Island, August 17, 1776, when the American Army under General Washington was defeated and compelled to retire to the northern part of Manhattan Island, the British prison-ships anchored in the Wallabout Bay were crowded with American naval prisoners who underwent experiences of a horrible nature, probably unequaled in the history of modern warfare.

Of these ships there were the *Whitby*, *Prince of Wales*, *Goodhope*, and the *Old Jersey*, or "Hell," as it was called by those who were confined in her—often more that a thousand at a time—in consequence of the sufferings they endured.

They all lay in the channel between what is now the Cob Dock and the inner shore of the bay, the *Old Jersey* being at the west side, nearly opposite what is now the west entrance to the New York navy-yard. The prisoners were crowded together in these dismantled ships or hulks, poorly fed and badly treated, and they died by thousands. It is estimated that between 11,000 and 12,000 prisoners perished on these vessels, it being claimed that the mortality on the *Old Jersey* alone amounted to five a day.

The prison-ships were originally the transport vessels in which cattle and other supplies for the British army had been brought to America in 1776, and which had been anchored in Gravesend Bay and occupied by the prisoners taken in the battle of Brooklyn. Upon the occupation of the city by the British these soldiers were transferred to the prisons on shore and the transports were devoted more especially to the marine prisoners, whose numbers were rapidly increasing, owing to the frequent capture of American privateers by the King's cruisers.

The first prison-ship anchored in the Wallabout was the transport *Whitby*. She was moored near Remsen's mill, which was on the west shore of the bay, near Martyn's Point, or Martyr's Hook, as it was sub-

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sequently called, about the 20th of October, 1776, and crowded with prisoners. Here the prisoners had bad provisions, worse water, and even these rations were small. No medical man attended the sick, disease had full sway, and pestilence reigned supreme. Hundreds died from pestilence or starvation, and the sand beach between the ravine in the hills—where Little street, Brooklyn, now is—and the shore became filled with graves in the course of two months.

In May, 1777, two large ships were anchored in the Wallabout, when the prisoners were transferred from the *Whitby* to them. These ships subsequently took fire, and some of the prisoners were burned in them before they could be removed to other vessels. In 1779 the *Prince of Wales* and the *Good Hope* were used as prison ships. The latter was burned in 1780, and then the *Stromboli*, *Scorpion*, and *Hunter*, all nominally hospital ships, took their place in the Wallabout. There were nearly a dozen others, but of all the *Old Jersey* won pre-eminence in the sad history of the prison ships. She was originally a sixty-gun ship and had a long and honorable career, but, being unfit for further active service, in 1776, was converted into a prison ship. She was dismantled, her port-holes were closed and securely fastened, and their places supplied by two tiers of small holes, each about 20 inches in diameter, with two iron bars crossed at right angles. Caged in the body of this hulk, with little light and almost no fresh air, packed together like animals, poorly fed on what was sometimes spoiled and wormy food, and given water that was stagnant, the prisoners died off like flies. It was no wonder that they gave their horrible hole of suffering, pestilence, and death the nickname of "Old Hell."

The horrors of these ships are a matter of history. The foul air, confinement, darkness, hunger, thirst, the slow poison of the malarious locality, the torments of vermin, the suffocating heat in summer, the excessive cold in winter, the horrible brutality of the officers and the guards, who would frequently fire among or bayonet the prisoners for some trivial or pretended offense, the almost total absence of hope, are things too sickening to dwell upon.

At the expiration of the war the *Old Jersey* was abandoned where she lay. The dread of contagion prevented any one venturing on board, but it was not long until the worms, which had been at work upon her timbers, made way for the water to rush in, and she went down into the waters of the Wallabout, carrying with her the only record of the names of thousands of sufferers which had been inscribed upon her inner planks.

The dead from these ships had been taken on shore and buried in trenches dug in the sand, and for years after the war their bones were found all around the bend of the bay, but more especially on the west side. We are informed by parties connected with the navy-yard that even now in making excavations they find the bones of human beings, supposed to have been victims of the prison ships.

For several years after the war was over the bones of those who suffered martyrdom in these ships for the cause of liberty were to be seen, scarce covered, on the banks of the Wallabout, or strewn upon its shores and bleaching in the winter's storm and summer's sun. Several patriotic individuals endeavored to have the attention of Congress directed to the subject, but no formal movement was made to give the bones proper interment until 1792, when the citizens of Brooklyn, at a regular town meeting, resolved that the bones which had been disinterred and collected by John Jackson should be removed and buried in

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the graveyard of the Reformed Church and a monument erected over them.

John Jackson was a native of Queens County, L. I., who removed to Brooklyn soon after the Revolution. About 1791 he purchased what was known as the Remsen estate, situated on the Wallabout, which comprised about 30 acres of land, 35 of pond, together with the old Remsen mill and dwelling. This farm was partly on what was known as Martyr's or Martyn's Hook, where Little street runs down to the water, and extended as far west as Gold street, and east into the navy-yard. It was in making improvements on the farm that Mr. Jackson found large quantities of the bones in cutting away the high banks which then formed the shore of the bay. In 1801 he sold 40 acres of this farm to the United States for a navy-yard, it being the west portion of the yard, north of the present York-street entrance. When the committee of the town-meeting above mentioned applied, in 1793, for the privilege of removing the bones Mr. Jackson refused, as he had other plans in view. He was an influential member and a sachem of the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order. He offered this society an eligible piece of ground on his property in the Wallabout at a point which is now at the east end of Front street, by the navy-yard wall, for the purpose of erecting a suitable sepulchre, which the society accepted.

In 1803 a memorial to Congress was prepared and sent to Washington, but nothing was done by this body. In the mean time, Benjamin Aycrigg, shocked at the exposed condition of the remains, made a contract in 1805 with an Irishman living in the Wallabout "to collect the bones as far as may be without digging," and deliver them to him at a stipulated price, which was done, and the remains thus collected formed a portion of those afterward placed in the Tomb of the Martyrs. In 1808 the Tammany Society appointed a committee and proceeded to take steps toward the long-talked of sepulchre. They initiated an extensive correspondence, published stirring appeals, and invited patriotic citizens all over the country to make a national affair of it. The public took hold zealously, and showed so much interest that the corner-stone of the tomb was laid on the 13th of April, 1808. An imposing military and civic procession formed at Fulton Ferry, under Major Aycrigg, grand marshal, and marched through Main, Sands, Bridge, and Jackson (now Hudson) streets, Brooklyn, to the vault on Jackson street adjoining the navy-yard. Benjamin Romainé, grand sachem of Tammany, assisted by the Wallabout committee, laid the corner-stone of the vault, upon which was the inscription:

In the name of the spirits of the departed free, sacred to the memory of American seamen, soldiers, and citizens who perished on board the prison-ships of the British at the Wallabout during the Revolution.

This is the corner-stone of the vault erected by the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, which contains their remains, the ground for which was bestowed by John Jackson, Nassau Island. Season of blossoms. Year of the discovery the 316th, of the institution the 19th, and of American Independence the 32d.

April 6, 1808.

Ceremonies were completed by the interment of thirteen mammoth coffins, and orations by the most distinguished men of the day.

Subsequent to the interment the excitement was kept up for a while. Some money was collected, and then the Martyrs' Tomb dropped out of public notice. Stiles, in his "Wallabout Prison-Ship Series," speaking of the Tammany demonstration, gives this peroration:

The pious tribute of the living to the dead is always solemn and affecting; a society in mourning for a hero is interesting to every one who beholds it, but a nation of freemen bending in tears over the tomb of eleven thousand martyrs to the cause of

liberty is a sight never before exhibited and presents a sublime theme for the historian and the poet. Happy, happy Columbia! May returning years still find thee as thou art this day—grateful to thy heroes, the nurse of liberty, at peace with the world.

After the great procession the tomb, unfinished, was left to take care of itself.

When the grade of Jackson street was altered the walls of the vault were infringed upon, and finally the very lot with the tomb upon it, containing the moldering dust of these 11,000 heroes, was sold for taxes.

Benjamin Romaine, a true patriot, who had been a soldier in the war, came forward and bought the lot, rescuing the remains from desecration. He erected an ante-chamber over the vault and appropriately adorned it. This was in 1839. Mr. Romaine held the place sacred, and in order to protect it from desecration he appropriated the tomb as a burial place for himself and family. At his death, in 1844, his body was placed in a coffin which he had long kept for himself in the vault. Two years before his death a committee of citizens petitioned the legislature for leave to remove the bones for the purpose of appropriate sepulcher, but Mr. Romaine protested. He said:

I have guarded these sacred remains, with a reverence which perhaps at this day all may not appreciate or feel, for more than thirty years. They are now in their right place, near the wall about and adjoining the navy-yard. They are my property. I have expended more than $900 in and about their protection and preservation. I commend them to the protection of the General Government. I bequeath them to my country. This concern is very sacred to me. It lies near my heart. I suffered with those whose bones I venerate. I fought beside them; I bled with them.

In consequence of this remonstrance nothing was done.

Ten years later a large meeting of citizens of Brooklyn resolved—

That the time has arrived when the cities of New York and Brooklyn can not, without criminality, longer delay the necessary efforts for rearing the monument to the martyrs of the prison ships—

and an organization was formed, entitled the "Martyrs' Monumental Association," in which each senatorial district in the State of New York and each State and Territory in the Union was represented. They set to work, selected a site on Fort Greene, secured plans for the monument, agitated the subject, and solicited donations. But once more enthusiasm died, and two more decades had almost passed before anything was done.

The common council of the city of Brooklyn having granted the association an appropriate lot on Fort Greene, called Washington Park, the site was utilized in 1873. In that year a brick vault, 25 by 11 feet, was completed in the side of the hill facing toward the junction of Myrtle avenue and Canton street, it being the nearest point toward the Wallabout. By this time the vault on Hudson avenue (formerly Jackson street) had become so dilapidated from neglect that the remains were in an exposed state, many of the old coffins being broken or defaced. Twenty-two new boxes were procured, the old coffins placed in them, and on the 17th day of June, 1873, all that remained of the mortal part of the 11,000 martyrs of the prison-ships was quietly removed to the vault at Washington Park. There was no ostentation this time; it was simply a labor of love. After nearly a century of neglect, relieved occasionally by spasmodic bursts of patriotism, the bones were at last placed in a spot where it is believed they will rest undisturbed until time shall be no more. So quietly was the removal performed, and so little interest does it seem to have elicited, that the daily papers of the day did not make any mention of it. The vault was covered with asphalt and the surface restored, and there are few people in the city to-day who know where these bones

lie buried. The base work of the intended ornamental stone superstructure has been constructed, upon which it is intended to erect the monument proposed by the accompanying bill.

This chosen site of Fort Greene is a lofty eminence looking down upon the Wallabout, where the prison ships were anchored; it also commands a view of the whole city of Brooklyn and the surrounding country upon which in 1876 the battle of Long Island was fought. During the battle this battery was known as Fort Putnam, in honor of General Putnam, who was the immediate commander of the American Army during the illness of General Greene. From this eminence General George Washington, Commander-in-Chief, became the agonizing witness of the rout and slaughter of Sullivan's command, and during the whole engagement directed the movements of the American Army. It was here that he signed the order to retreat, when he saw that resistance in the face of overwhelming forces was useless. On this spot he encouraged the suffering soldiers with words of hope during the last day of the battle until the night brought the fog that made retreat possible.

Immediately after this memorable retreat the British, having gained absolute possession, used Brooklyn for the incarceration of the prisoners of war.

News of the barbarous and inhuman treatment of these prisoners reached Congress in 1781, when a special committee was appointed consisting of Mr. Boudinot, Mr. Sharpe, and Mr. Clymer, who submitted the following resolutions:

Resolved, That it appears to Congress that a very large number of marine prisoners and citizens of the United States, taken by the enemy, are now close confined on board prison-ships in the harbor of New York.

That the said prison-ships are so unequal in size to the number of prisoners as not to admit of a possibility of preserving life in this warm season of the year, they being crowded together in such a manner as to be in danger of suffocation, as well as exposed to every kind of putrid and pestilential disorder.

That no circumstances of the enemy's particular situation can justify this outrage on humanity, it being contrary to the usage and custom of civilized nations thus deliberately to murder their captives in cold blood, as the enemy will not assert that prison-ships equal to the number of prisoners can not be obtained so as to afford room sufficient for the necessary purposes of life.

That the enemy do daily improve the distresses to enlist and compel many of our citizens to enter on board their ships of war, and thus to fight against their fellow-citizens and dearest connections.

That the said marine prisoners, until they can be exchanged, should be supplied with such necessaries of clothing and provisions as can be obtained to mitigate their present sufferings.

That therefore the Commander-in-Chief be, and is hereby, instructed to remonstrate to the proper officer within the enemy's lines on the said unjustifiable treatment of our marine prisoners, and demand in the most express terms to know the reasons of this unnecessary severity towards them; and that the Commander-in-Chief transmit such answer as may be received thereon to Congress, that decided measures for due retaliation may be adopted, if a redress of these evils is not immediately given.

That the Commander-in-Chief be, and is hereby, instructed to direct the supplying of the said prisoners with such provisions and light clothing for their present more comfortable subsistence as may be in his power to obtain, and in such manner as he may deem most advantageous for these United States.

There is no question that these men were martyrs to the cause of liberty; that those who survived the war and were honored by the grateful care of their Government and esteemed until the close of their lives for their patriotism and valor were entitled to much less than these unfortunate victims of cruelty and hardship, and that the least that the Government can do at this time is to erect to them a monument upon which shall be inscribed a record of their service and the story of their martyrdom.

The propriety of the erection of such a monument by the nation will not be questioned in view of these facts.

These helpless victims were prisoners of war, belonging not to any city or State, but to the whole country; captured by the enemy while in the service of their country in both the Army and Navy; citizens of all the original thirteen States, and numbered more than were slain in all the battles, both by land and sea, of that long and desperate struggle for freedom.

Had these victims been less arduous in their patriotism or less firm in their devotion to liberty; had they purchased their lives by enlisting in the service of the enemy, as they were daily importuned to do, and this army of 12,000 valiant men been added to the forces against which Washington and his compatriots were fighting the struggle of our forefathers would have no doubt been greatly prolonged.

There has been laid before the committee the following concurrent resolutions relative to erection of a monument to the "martyrs of the prison-ships" at the Wallabout during the Revolutionary war, passed by the senate and assembly of the State of New York, February 28, 1888:

Whereas the "Society of Old Brooklynites," of the City of Brooklyn, has presented a petition to the Congress of the United States for the erection of a monument to commemorate the virtues and patriotism of more than 12,000 soldiers and sailors who perished on board the prison-ships at the Wallabout during the Revolutionary war; and

Whereas those unhappy victims were citizens of the United States, prisoners of war, captured while in the service of this country during its long and desperate struggle for freedom, when the Government was too feeble to afford them protection or relieve their sufferings: Therefore,

Resolved (if the assembly concur), That the Senators and Representatives in Congress from this State be and they hereby are earnestly requested to use all honorable means in their power to secure the passage of the bill (H. R. 1687) having for its object the erection of a monument to the memory of the "martyrs of the prison-ships."

Resolved (if the assembly concur), That a duly certified copy of the foregoing preamble and resolutions be forwarded to each Senator and Representative in Congress from this State.

Also the following resolution from the Kings County board of supervisors, passed January 19, 1888:

Whereas the "Society of Old Brooklynites," of the city of Brooklyn, have petitioned the Congress of the United States for an appropriation to fitly commemorate by a monument the "Martyrs of the Prison Ships" of the Revolutionary war; and

Whereas this board heartily approves of the motives and patriotic zeal displayed by the said society in the noble effort to inspire devotion to country, perpetuating the virtues of those who sacrificed their lives for republican principles, thus stimulating future generations to emulate their patriotism: Therefore, be it

Resolved, That the board of supervisors of Kings County does hereby approve of and indorse the honorable and praiseworthy efforts of the "Society of Old Brooklynites" to obtain a fitting monument to be placed over the remains of those who perished at the birth of this Republic.

Resolved, That we most cordially extend to the "Society of Old Brooklynites" our earnest support and encouragement, and express the hope that their efforts will be rewarded by the people through their Representatives in Congress.

Similar resolutions were also adopted by the board of aldermen.

Also the following petition from the "Society of Old Brooklynites," who have been mainly instrumental in preserving these relics and in bringing these historical facts before this committee:

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

Your petitioners, an incorporated society of the city of Brooklyn, under the title of "The Society of Old Brooklynites," would respectfully represent:

That the remains of more than eleven thousand five hundred martyrs to the cause of liberty lie entombed in this city, who died during our Revolutionary war, on board

the prison-ships of the British at the Wallabout, and which were buried on our shores during that memorable struggle, many of which were by the action of the waves washed out of their shallow graves, their bones scattered along the beach, exposed to the summer's sun and winter's storms until the year 1808, when the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, of the city of New York, had them collected and buried with imposing ceremonies, in which the governors of several States, mayors of cities, and civil, military, and ecclesiastical dignitaries from all parts of the country took part.

The place of burial was on Jackson street in this city, and the tomb—a temporary wooden structure, in which they were placed—became so dilapidated—by reason of changes made in the surroundings and from natural decay, that the sacred remains were again exposed to the gaze of the multitude, until the park commissioners of this city, with the sanction of the city government, prepared with great care and expense a permanent and imperishable tomb for their reception on the historic ground of Fort Greene—a charming elevation in Washington Park in this city, overlooking the scene of their sufferings and death—to which the sacred remains were cheerfully removed and deposited.

These devoted patriots, from every one of the original thirteen States, were prisoners of war, taken by the British army and navy, and numbered more than were killed in all the battles, both by sea and land, in that long and desperate struggle for freedom.

When it is remembered that constant and unremitting efforts were made by the British officers to induce these prisoners to purchase their freedom and save their lives by enlisting in the service of the enemy; that many, probably the majority of them, had families who were suffering by reason of their absence; that to remain in these horrible prisons was almost certain death; and that under all these circumstances they remained faithful to the cause in which they had enlisted, and preferred death to dishonor, we must concede that they earned the title of *Martyrs of the Prison Ships*, and deserve such recognition from the Government, to aid in the establishment of which they sacrificed their lives, as will show to the world that Republics are not ungrateful, but that we cherish their memories, honor their devotion to their country, and will erect such an enduring monument to commemorate their virtues as will stimulate future generations to emulate their patriotism.

We, therefore, most respectfully ask that your honorable body will make an appropriation of not less than $100,000 toward the erection of a suitable monument to be erected at or near the spot where their sacred remains now lie, the site for which will be donated for that purpose by the city of Brooklyn.

This society will most cheerfully give all the aid in their power toward the accomplishment of the object of this petition.

Also the following petition, signed by twenty-five thous and citizens of the United States:

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

Your petitioners, citizens of the United States, do respectfully and earnestly pray your honorable body to hear and grant the petition of the Society of Old Brooklynites and to cause the erection of the long delayed monument to the martyrs of the prison ships.

Your committee therefore recommend that the bill do pass with the following amendment:

Provided, That the money appropriated as aforesaid shall be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War, and the plans, specifications, and design shall first be approved by him.

50TH CONGRESS, 1st Session. } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. { REPORT No. 1336.

FOURTH REGIMENT IOWA INFANTRY.

MARCH 27, 1888.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

Mr. GEAR, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 1387.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 1387) for the relief of the volunteers of the Fourth Regiment of Iowa Volunteers, report the same back to the House, with a recommendation to concur in the Senate amendments thereto.